

# What the Buddha Taught

The Buddha who attained enlightenment discovered the world reality and explained it to the world kindly. He purified his mind completely eradicating all defilements in his mind. The Buddha is not a god or a god's messenger. There are no creations or the God's messages in his teachings. Whether a Buddha appears or not in the world this world reality is forever. Therefore the Buddha's message is the truth that anybody can discover (achieve) by his wisdom. The Buddha's main teaching is the way how to achieve real happiness. According to the Buddha's message, the real happiness depends on how much we have overcome suffering such as old age, death and rebirth. The main reasons, that we suffer, are desire, anger and delusion. Delusion means no real understanding about the reason of suffering. Because of these three reasons when the world changes, and when the world is out of our control, we suffer. If we can overcome delusion, big attachment and anger decrease gradually. It says we gradually overcome suffering in this life itself.

The Buddha's message that leads to get rid of unsatisfactoriness and achieve real happiness is very clear and systematic. Listening to this message is a very rare chance. Today we have to listen to it because of a lot of merits and blessings that we have done in previous lives. The sublime truth that the Buddha explained is well expounded (*Svakkhato*), directly visible (*Sanditthiko*), immediately effective (*Akaliko*), calling one to come and see (*Ehipassiko*), leading onwards (*Opanaiko*), to be personally realized by the wise (*Paccattam Veditabbo Vinnuhi*). If the Buddha has preached any teaching to get rid of suffering, nobody can say that it doesn't cause to get rid of suffering with details. At the very beginning on this spiritual path first of all we should be honest, intelligent and kind. To achieve the final bliss of liberation or enlightenment, we have to listen to the Buddha's message with good attention for our knowledge. At the very first level in Buddhism the knowledge is very important. Buddhism compares knowledge as wealth (*Suta Dhanam*). To achieve all kinds of results such as intelligence that Buddhism teaches, knowledge plays a major role. It is not only enough knowledge but reflecting on it again and again is also very important. Furthermore, we have to practice it in our daily life as morality (*Seela*) and meditation (*Bhavana*) to see the results in our life. Meditation is further divided into two as tranquility (*Samatha*) and insight (*Vipassana*). Hence all doctrines that focus on liberation can be included in three steps, those are discipline, tranquility and wisdom.

When we practice the Buddha's message, our intelligence which causes to overcome suffering grows up gradually. Intelligence or wisdom (*Samma Ditthi*) that Buddhism explains can be divided into two. The first step of intelligence is the understanding of the karmic law. Here we may have enough knowledge about the Karmic force that when we do some activities with wicked mind, we will have the bad results because of polluted mind. Furthermore, when we do something with pure mind, we will have the fruitful results because of pure mind. When a person has this knowledge, he doesn't like to suffer doing bad deeds with wicked mind. He always tries to get rid of bad deeds and develop good deeds with pure mind in the name of real happiness. He does these things not only for

happiness of next birth, but in this life itself. This intelligent person always practices generosity, virtue and meditation as much as he can.

The second step of intelligence is the understanding of cause and effect (*Paticca-samuppada*), the dependent origination. This is the main theme or the unique teaching in Buddhism. We get experience through our senses such as eyes, ears, nose ..... When we see, hear or smell something, it means five aggregates (Forms, feelings, perception, mental formations and consciousness) arise together and cease at the moment. The nature of this experience is arising at the moment and instantly ceases at once. ***Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) would not come to (the future) occurrence*** (අනුත්වා සම්භවං හුත්වා න භවිස්සති). It means if we experience something now, it was not in existent in the past in the same way like now. Also present experience doesn't go to the future in the same way. If somebody can understand this reality, he is ready to give up extremes about the past and the future. Also he tries to live in the present moment seeing arising and ceasing wisely with full awareness.

According to Buddhism, ignorance or delusion which is unknowing of impermanence is the main cause of suffering. Ignorance is the main defilement. When we have ignorance other defilements like greed, jealousy, hatred and ill will arise in our mind, and they disturb our peace of mind. If we are able to see everything as impermanence, we have nothing to get as greed or ill will. We have only present experience which arises at the moment. It arises and ceases instantly. When conditions are together, we have experience. When conditions separate, the experience ceases. For an example, when eye, form, eye consciousness, feelings, perception, mental formations etc are together, we have experience about a form. All of reasons arise at the moment with the conditions. They were not before, they will not remain.

According to the ultimate truth, that the Buddha discovered, this is the world reality whether we like or not, and whether we know or not. Unknowing or ignorance of cause and effect is the main cause of suffering. If somebody has this knowledge, he tries to overcome suffering practicing the Buddha's message. He may find the path to this goal. The path of purification is the Noble Eight Fold Path. For the real happiness and getting rid of suffering this is the only path.

## **1. Right Understanding (*Sammà ditti*)**

The main cause of suffering is ignorance or delusion (*Avijja*). If we like to overcome suffering or unsatisfactoriness, we have to reduce ignorance. Right understanding is the opposite of ignorance. As much as we listen to the Buddha's message and reflect on it, we can develop right understanding. This understanding causes us to go on the path getting rid of suffering towards the final goal.

When we practice the path that leads to purify our mind, we should have correct knowledge about the world and ourselves. As it is mentioned before, the first step of right understanding is the confidence of karmic law, as believing in fate. It means when we do good deeds with pure mind, we will have the good results and when we do bad deeds with wicked mind, we will have the bad results because of polluted mind. The second step of right understanding is the understanding of dependent origination. It means

understanding of impermanence. That is, when conditions are together, the experience arises and when the conditions cease, the experience also ceases. According to this view, the impermanence which is taught in Buddhism is the understanding of arising and ceasing of our experience through our senses. If someone has this understanding, he puts an earnest to purify his mind from negative thoughts because he doesn't like to suffer any more. He continues to the second step.

## **2. Right Thoughts (*Sammà samkappa*)**

According to right understanding, further we are not ready to suffer. That is why we are going to purify our mind from unwholesome or negative thoughts such as desire and hatred. We are always sensitive and watchful when the thoughts come to our mind whether they are good or bad. Here, we know very well that when negative thoughts such as anger, desire, jealousy, etc. come to our mind, we suffer or worry. And when positive thoughts such as kindness, friendliness, compassion, generosity, etc. come to our mind, our mind is pure, calm, quiet, peaceful and happy. That is why we always try to live with right thoughts because of right understanding.

## **3. Right Speech (*Sammà vācā*)**

Then he goes towards the path. Now he is ready to control his speech too. When he tells something, he reflects on it again and again whether it is correct or not. Here he avoids false, backbiting, rash and rubbish words for the sake of happiness. He practices the discipline in speech. He always protects the consistency of speech in all his life.

## **4. Right Action (*Sammà kammanta*)**

He has not only verbal discipline but he has behavioral discipline as well. Here he abstains from stealing, killing others and having sexual misconduct. Because of right understanding, he knows very well, when he has those bad actions, he has to face the inevitable consequences and knows how it leads to more suffering in the long-run. That is why he gets rid of those activities. He wishes the pleasant, calm happy life.

## **5. Right Livelihood (*Sammà ājīva*)**

Further he goes on the path of satisfactoriness. He engages in right livelihood and always attempts to do righteous jobs leaving wrong jobs such as killing animals, selling drugs and poisons. As the result of these good activities his happiness gradually increases. Because of right understanding, he practices his correct knowledge for all his activities. He never forgets his spiritual goals even though he lives in complex and difficult situations, because he always lives in a righteous way with right understanding.

## **6. Right Effort (*Sammà vāyāma*)**

And his courage develops to do good and to get rid of bad. Especially, here we make sure not to give rise to bad deeds that are not yet arisen in us, and try to give up bad things that already we do. Further, we

try to initiate good things that we haven't started yet and try to keep developing good that we are already doing. It means we are on the way to happiness.

## 7. Right Mindfulness (*Sammà sati*)

Here he does all his activities with mindfulness. He knows very well that when he loses his mindfulness, he loses his happiness. Therefore he always does everything mindfully and reflects on his feelings, mind and mental formations with awareness. Mindfulness in Buddhism is a major quality that we have to practice. And it is the center of all kinds of spiritual factors. All kinds of doctrines in Buddhism can be included into mindfulness. Mindfulness is divided into four as;

- The contemplation of body (*Kayanupassana*)
- The contemplation of feelings (*Vedananupassana*)
- The contemplation of mind (*Cittanupassana*)
- The contemplation of mental formations (*Dhammanupassana*)

## 8. Right Tranquility or Concentration (*Sammà samàdhi*)

Furthermore, practicing his mind by meditation, he always tries to keep his mind away from defilements such as desire, anger and delusion. Here, he is clever to keep his mind for a long time with wholesome thoughts. His mind is pure, calm and quite like clear water in a well.

With this concentrated mind he reflects on the impermanence, suffering and egolessness (or selflessness) again and again. The understanding of three characteristics of existence grows up every moment when we are on the path to purification. As the result of practicing this correct path, gradually he reaches to the ultimate liberation of the mind. And he reaches other two steps too which are '**the right knowledge of suffering**' (*Samma Nana*) and '**the right liberation of suffering**' (*Samma Vimukti*).' When we are on this path, we can see the result in our life that we are growing up with honesty, loving kindness and wisdom. If we are on the real path of purification, day by day, moment by moment we are going forward on this eightfold path. It means, avoiding suffering we are reaching to liberation and happiness. The Buddha explains that this is the direct path, this is the noble path, and this is the real path to cease from suffering, sorrow, sickness, death, old age and lamentation. If we are intelligent, honest, kind for beings and have faith in the Buddha's enlightenment, we can go along this path.

**(Tuesday Dhamma discussion in Los Angeles Buddhist Vihara in Pasadena.  
05/19/2015)**